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Viewing cable 08BEIRUT652, LEBANON: MARCH 14 LEADERS APPEAL FOR STRONGER USG

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08BEIRUT652**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08BEIRUT652	2008-05-11 21:32	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Beirut

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/11352>
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/11351>
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/11627>
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/11626>
<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/11712>
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INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2251
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2557
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000652

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR A/S SILVERBERG AND PDAS WARLICK

USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/KUMAR/PHEE
NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [UNSC](#) [EAIR](#) [SA](#) [IR](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: MARCH 14 LEADERS APPEAL FOR STRONGER USG
SUPPORT

REF: A. BEIRUT 642

[B](#). BEIRUT 618

[C](#). BEIRUT 648

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#). (C) On May 11, Phalange leader and former President Amine Gemayel, Social Affairs Minister Nayla Mouawad, and Telecommunications Minister Marwan Hamadeh impressed upon the Charge the gravity of the situation and pressed her for stronger U.S. support for March 14. Believing that a Hizballah victory could be imminent, they proposed several ideas, including extending UN Security Council resolution 1701 to Beirut International Airport, the port, and access roads, imposing an air ban by the U.S. against Syria, and arming their own militias with U.S. assistance. They said they felt let down by the U.S. and the international communities. They expressed their dismay at Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Michel Sleiman's contradictory public statement and his private letter to PM Siniora, asserting that he is a "concierge" for Hizballah. They are not surprised to see LAF officers resigning as a result of Sleiman's "unwillingness" to protect the Lebanese. End summary.

TELL WASHINGTON: THE SITUATION
IS VERY GRAVE; WE NEED SUPPORT

[2](#). (C) At 1500 on May 11, the Charge, accompanied by Defense Attach and PolOff, met with Phalange leader and former President Amine Gemayel and his advisor Michel Mecattaf, Social Affairs Minister Nayla Mouawad and her son Michel Mouawad, and Telecommunications Minister Marwan Hamadeh at Gemayel's residence in Beirut. Gemayel wanted the Charge to communicate to Washington the gravity of the situation and to report back that the March 14 leaders are "very worried." Holding in his hand the statements made by Secretary Rice and the White House on May 9, Gemayel commented that the statements fell short of what he was expecting, and that he was hoping for more support from Washington. He said he needed to be sure that the U.S. is as concerned as March 14 and that the U.S. Government was aware of the gravity of the situation. The Charge assured the March 14 leaders that Washington is very concerned and does not want to see any more loss of life and wants Hizballah's aggression stopped immediately.

[3](#). (C) "It is not a minor crisis," Gemayel warned. "We may be at the end of an Iranian/Syrian process to take over Lebanon." He added to the Charge, "We have to stop Syria and Iran or else you will be presenting your credentials to Damascus. It will be very dangerous if the March 14 alliance has to surrender. It will be a catastrophe for Lebanon and a bad message to the U.S.'s allies elsewhere," he stated. He suggested the U.S. consider "tough, precise, and serious measures" against Iran and its proxies.

[4](#). (C) Gemayel said that any compromise is equal to a disaster because a compromise gives Hizballah and Iran the incentive to "take more" in Lebanon. Gemayel expressed March 14's dedication to do whatever is necessary to defeat Hizballah. However, March 14 needs to feel they are backed by the international community with "words and effectiveness." Gemayel said, "We are ready to offer more

martrs like my son Pierre if that is what it takes" (Pierre Gemayel, assassinated in November 2006, had served as Industry and Trade Minister.)

DISAPPOINTED IN INTERNATIONAL,
ARAB SUPPORT

¶15. (C) Telecommunications Minister Hamadeh interjected, "At the most critical moment, we see Europe and the U.S. acting most passively." He expressed his disappointment with European and U.S. responses. "We don't count anymore on our

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international friends. We believe we've been dumped and fooled." Gemayel chimed in, "The statements from the Arabs are nonsense!"

PROPOSING "PRECISE MEASURES"

¶16. (C) Noting that March 14 leaders Saad Hariri and Walid Jumblatt are "under siege", Social Affairs Minister Mouawad proposed several "precise measures" to show the rest of the country that March 14 "has not lost." She dismissed the idea of an Arab peacekeeping force in Lebanon (Ref A), saying that it would not work. She first recommended extending UN Security Council resolution 1701 to Beirut International Airport, the port, and access roads.

¶17. (C) Second, she suggested stronger sanctions placed against Syria by the U.S., such as a ban on air travel. "Syria should not be able to use its airport until we can use ours," she remarked, noting that one of the last planes to land at Beirut International Airport (BIA) was an Iranian flight. (Michel Mecattaf joked, "We don't want an air ban, we want air strikes!" Nayla Mouawad confirmed that the Rene Mouawad airport, also known as Kleyate in the north was operable for commercial flights, but that the air traffic control tower was located in Beirut. She added that PM Siniora had inquired about the airport's operability the previous day. (Note: Defense Attach remarked that the control tower issue could be resolved. End note.)

¶18. (C) Mouawad's third suggestion was to arm March 14 supporters. Gemayel said that the March 14 leaders know how to ready their militias, but would need "quiet support" from the U.S., stressing that they would need arms within the next five to six days in order to defeat Hizballah.

¶19. (C) Mouawad suggested that a valuable short-term solution would be a visit to Beirut by a quadripartite delegation composed of the Egyptians, Jordanians, Saudis, and Kuwaitis. During the meeting, we received a press report that the Arab League foreign ministers were proposing a National Dialogue with two representatives each from the opposition and from March 14, and an Arab FM. Gemayel called this proposal "junk!"

SLEIMAN'S CONTRADICTING
LETTER AND PUBLIC STATEMENT

¶10. (C) Mouawad asserted that the Cabinet does not want to retract its decisions to transfer the head of airport security and declare Hizballah's fiber optics network illegal (Ref B). Gemayel stated that Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Michel Sleiman is "doing a dirty job." Gemayel explained that immediately after Sleiman's declaration yesterday (Ref C), Sleiman sent a letter to Prime Minister Fouad Siniora informing the PM that he had investigated the Cabinet's decisions and that the government should cancel its decisions. The letter contradicts his statement, Mouawad reasoned. (Note: The statement said that the LAF would investigate the decisions, whereas Sleiman's letter stated that he had already investigated the matters, and now the

Cabinet should revoke its decisions. End note.)

¶11. (C) Gemayel remarked that Sleiman's public declaration was an attempt to demonstrate that Beirut is returning to normal and that the LAF has control over Beirut. "Sleiman is a concierge for Hizballah," he claimed. He continued, "We are seeing the final sprint of Syria and Iran, through its instrument, Hizballah."

¶12. (C) Hamadeh noted that Sleiman's public statement gave fodder to Syria to declare at the Arab League foreign ministers' meeting in Cairo (taking place during this meeting) that the Cabinet initiated this crisis with its decisions. Hamadeh confided that Siniora was unsure how to instruct Acting Foreign Minister Tareq Mitri to respond to Sleiman's declaration at the Arab League meeting. (Note: The Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation was reporting escalating clashes in Aley between Druze and Hizbollah fighters during the meeting, and a distraught Hamadeh

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departed for Druze leader Walid Jumblatt's residence. End note.)

INTERPRETING LAF RESIGNATIONS

¶13. (C) The meeting was interrupted by a press report that senior Sunni commander Brigadier General Abdulhamid Darewish resigned from the LAF. The group concurred that, "An officer who respects himself cannot accept what the LAF has been doing." Michel Mouawad insisted that the LAF was not neutral, adding that March 14 leaders had been counting on the protection of the LAF and had consequently not prepared their own militias.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) Clearly distraught, the March 14 leaders were practically begging us to do something, anything, to prevent further erosion and possible evaporation of their political terrain. The March 14 leaders exhibited a sense of urgency and concern that we did not observe with others today. End Comment.

SISON